



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

AMERICAN STATISTICAL ASSOCIATION

NEW SERIES, No. 111.

SEPTEMBER, 1915.

THE SOCIAL SURVEY AND ITS FURTHER DEVELOPMENT.*

BY J. L. GILLIN, PH.D., *Department of Sociology, the University of Wisconsin.*

Never has the world seen such a passion to apply to society the aphorism of the ancient philosopher, "Know Thyself" as we find rising in the communities of today. Statistics of some sort the world has had for a long time; statistics concerning the things about which we are gathering information today, however, until recently have been very few if not entirely lacking.

Never as now have men put the test of efficiency to political, economic, and social movements and agencies. In business, cost of production and distribution cannot longer be ignored or guessed at; they must be known. Thousands of dollars are spent by business and industrial firms every year for advice as to how the wastes of the business may be eliminated. Business organization is judged by its success in so coördinating the forces it employs that there may be the minimum of friction and waste. The efficiency movement, so-called, has produced remarkable results in commercial and industrial organizations.

The social survey is an expression of this same movement in the social as distinguished from the economic realm. The social survey is an endeavor to take stock of certain phases of the community which bear upon that community's welfare. Its methods have been borrowed, to begin with, from the commercial world in part, and in part from the methods of the census. The first great social survey of modern times was that of Charles Booth, in his *Life and Labor of the People of London*, on which he spent many years and a great fortune. It is the

* Paper prepared for the Annual Meeting of the American Statistical Association, Princeton, N. J., December 29, 1914.

most comprehensive social survey that has ever been made by a private party. The one great survey made in America by a private organization is the Pittsburgh Survey, which is not entirely published at this date. The movement has gained impetus in America by the establishment of a Department of Surveys and Exhibits by the Russell Sage Foundation, and by reason of the publicity that has been given to the results of the surveys of various magnitude in different parts of the United States. It has become almost a fad to start a social survey. Because of this popularity the survey is in danger of becoming a by-word and degenerating into a pleasant pastime for otherwise unoccupied people. On the other hand, this belief in social stock-taking supposed to be secured by the social survey, has made possible the rise of a group of professional surveyors who are endeavoring to commercialize this passion for social knowledge. These two vagaries, however, must not blind us to the possibilities of the social survey to contribute to community improvement.

Varieties of Surveys.—Social surveys vary first as to the scope of the survey and second as to the persons who may properly make the survey. The scope of the survey depends upon whether it is a survey for a small community or for a large one. It is very much easier to make a thorough-going survey of a small, simply organized community than of a large one with its complex interests, its interlocking organizations, and its immense diversity of population, economic activities, and social functions.

In the survey of small communities the effort may be to make a rather rapid preliminary survey that will produce an appreciation of the problems of the community. Such a survey can be made easily and cheaply and will serve as a working basis for a more intensive investigation of some of the significant problems discovered. On the other hand, a social survey may be a very complete investigation of the various interests, activities, industries, organizations, and phases of community life.

For the large community the social survey may take any one of a number of different forms. As in the case of the small community it may consist of a rapid, rather superficial kind

of social prospecting, confined to certain neighborhoods of the community. The purpose of this survey would be to provide a cross-section of the community life. Or the survey may be a wider investigation, but not intensive, taking in perhaps the whole community preparatory to a more complete study later. Or, it may seem best to make a complete survey of the whole city, based upon a preliminary survey by paying special attention to those phases of the city's life which the preliminary survey has shown to be of chief significance. The best example of this type is the Pittsburgh Survey. Or again, the survey may be a community problem survey. In this case, the investigation is confined to one or more specific problems in the community, such as health, recreation, sanitation, industry, etc.

The surveys differ from each other also with regard to the persons making the survey. An investigation of a community may be made by experts trained for such work. In that case the whole of the investigation would probably be made by parties from outside the city. Again, the survey may be made by certain interested persons in the community itself, under the direction of an expert. Or again, the survey may be made by certain people in the community on the basis of an outline and printed or typewritten plan prepared by experts.

Each of these plans has its advantages and its short-comings. The expert from the outside possesses the advantage of no acquaintance with the intricacies of the local situation and he can go ahead without reference to any existing prejudices. On the other hand, he suffers the disadvantage of not knowing the local situation and therefore is likely to spend a good deal of time in finding out things that are matters of common knowledge to the people of the community. The second plan has the advantage of expert direction and of local advice and coöperation. If it has any disadvantages they are incidental to the difficulty of securing coöperation between the people of the community being surveyed and the experts in charge of the work. The third plan has very narrow limitations. It cannot be used at all in large, and for only very superficial work in small communities. This method, however, serves as a possible beginning in community stock-taking, and, pro-

vided it is very carefully done, is a useful device to get people interested in a careful study of their community.

Further Steps.—The social survey has now developed to the place where it is manifest to careful observers that some further steps in its development are necessary. Certain short-comings have been complained of by its enemies, and certain others have been recognized by its friends. The difficulties of the social survey are incidental to its growth.

1. Some adaptability to the needs of various communities is now to be found in the methods of the social survey. It varies, as has already been indicated in the first part of this paper. It is felt, however, that it must be further perfected in its adaptability to the varying needs of different places and situations. The plan of a survey adapted to a small community, of course, is not adapted to a large community; neither are the methods used in making an intensive survey like those adapted to a "prospecting survey." Yet, for reasons that will be mentioned later, it is desirable that there be sufficient uniformity in the methods used for varying situations so that the results may be compared with exactness.

2. It is desirable also, that there be an improvement in the standards and units of measurement used. The technique of the survey must be further perfected. Through long experience civil and mechanical engineering have established certain standards and units of measurement which are generally recognized by all investigators in these lines. So, also, the good diagnostician has certain fundamental things concerning which he inquires in his endeavor to ascertain the causes of disease. Likewise, there are gradually developing among social surveyors certain standards for the measurement of social phenomena. These standards, however, differ somewhat from man to man, and there is lacking that agreement among social surveyors which is highly desirable. Moreover, as Miss Goldmark noticed a number of years ago, it is highly desirable that a unit of measurement in each class of phenomena investigated be more widely recognized than at present. The difficulty with the present diversity of units of the phenomena investigated makes it impossible to collate the results of different surveyors for purposes of comparison. Thus the develop-

ment of the technique of social surveying is one of the pressing needs just now. It is not intended that any hard and fast rules be laid down that shall hinder experiment at a time when social surveying is in its infancy. It is desirable, however, that those who are concerned for the perfection of the technique of social inquiry and who have had most experience in the gathering and handling of statistical data bearing upon social affairs should bring to the solution of this problem their intelligence and experience for the benefit both of the communities surveyed and of the scientific results to be obtained by the collection and comparison of data from widely different areas of our country. On the fundamentals there could well be agreement, even if there is diversity of opinion as to some of the details. The time has come when it is highly desirable that upon the fundamentals of the survey there should be general agreement, and that a body commanding the respect of students in the various fields of social phenomena should back up these standards with its prestige.

3. Incidental to the wide value which the social survey has begun to enjoy is the growth of a commercialized professionalism. Once the technique of surveying is established in a general agreement among those interested in such problems, doubtless the commercialized professional social surveyor will serve a useful purpose, just as the public accountant, the civil engineer, and the doctor occupy positions of honor and usefulness in our social life. Nevertheless, in the absence of established standards of survey work, the commercial social surveyor who depends upon his work for a living is a menace to the development of this method of social stock-taking. Now is the time to provide for the deliverance of the survey from the hands of the man who does social surveying on a commercial basis. Already in a number of our universities and colleges the social survey is established. Among these are the University of Minnesota, the University of Kansas, and the University of Wisconsin. Moreover, a number of private organizations are doing commendable work on the non-commercial basis. Among them are the Department of Church and Country Life of the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions and the Department of Surveys and Exhibits

of the Russell Sage Foundation. Besides these a number of the schools of philanthropy have devoted considerable attention to methods of investigations and supply training in social survey work. In special fields the Recreation Association of America, the Association of Societies for Organizing Charity, and a number of other bodies are doing survey work on a non-commercialized basis.

It is highly desirable that in the early development of this work the first consideration should not be the pecuniary return. The professional surveyor is likely to be open to criticism on a number of points. Too often he starts in on the social survey the victim of a pre-conceived hypothesis or of an established prejudice. He assumes that certain things are wrong. Unconsciously that conviction colors his findings. Having found certain things wrong in other communities, naturally he is looking for the same things in the community now under observation. Again, the commercialized surveyor is prone to look only for bad conditions rather than to make a correct appraisal both of the good and the evil in the community's life. He is likely to feel that he must find the evil that his employers have suspected, else he cannot justify his employment. In this respect he reminds one of the quack doctor who can secure business only by making out a bad case for the prospective patient. Such a surveyor may excite interest and secure employment for a time, but his methods are sure to bring reproach upon the whole survey movement.

Again, the social surveyor desires publicity for his work. He has learned that muck-raking secures publicity. Therefore he emphasizes the evil conditions in the community without stating them in their proper relations to the social assets of the community. Following the publication of a one-sided survey of this kind, there is bound to be a reaction on the part of those who know that the community is better than it has been painted.

Again, the commercialized surveyor, in borrowing the basic idea from the accountant and the shop efficiency expert, is prone to apply a yard stick to the measurement of ideas, to weigh the value of institutions with a clumsy steelyard, and to evaluate educational, recreational, religious, and other social

institutions by the standards of efficiency worked out in a business house or a factory. These clumsy methods and standards are bound to meet with rebuke. Who but a lop-sided social surveyor, obsessed by an idea half truth and half falsehood, can believe that the efficiency of a teacher, preacher, or a social worker can be measured by the same or even similar methods as those applied by the efficiency engineer to the foreman of a shop or the worker at a machine; or that the value of a social institution, such as a church or a school, can be determined by the number of services held in the former, or the number of hours spent in the latter? The social survey must result not merely in destructive criticism, but in a constructive program based upon a careful study of both the social assets and liabilities. Muck-raking in social surveying may have been a necessary incident to its development, but it is a question whether that necessary incident has not been also a necessary evil. Any community is justified in resenting the publication of its defects to the world unless its good qualities are set forth in as striking a manner. The ideal, of course, is that the good present should be made the basis for a constructive program to remedy the evils found. It is time that the various agencies at work at the present time on a non-commercialized basis should unite in their efforts to establish standards and methods for the social survey that will redeem it from the reproach into which commercialized social surveyors have sometimes brought it.

4. A still further step necessary to be taken that the social survey may fulfill its possible function in society is the standardization of methods so that the findings of the different surveys may be brought together for comparison. From the scientific standpoint it is highly desirable that the results of these various social investigations should be brought together in order that generalizations concerning our complex social life may be formed. Of course, the practical results of the survey are what is immediately desired by the community surveyed. Nevertheless, in the long run, the survey must provide a foundation of social fact upon which may be established principles regulating social life. Therefore, the next step is to provide for the collection and comparison of the

findings of the social surveys made in various parts of the country. To make these findings comparable, they must be secured according to uniform methods over standard units of area to be investigated.

5. If the contentions of this paper are correct, and I believe they represent the feelings of those who have watched the progress of the survey movement, then there should be organized a body representing the various groups of people interested in the social survey. This body of men should devote themselves to a study of the survey as it exists at the present time, suggest methods by which its defects may be removed, its technique perfected, and its results correlated for a larger purpose. The American Statistical Association, the American Sociological Society, the various private organizations doing survey work, and the colleges and universities should organize a joint standing committee on surveys and statistics to see that these steps are taken as rapidly as possible. So important an agency for the social welfare must not be exploited by selfish men for their own private gain in such a way as to destroy its usefulness. A standing committee formed from these bodies already mentioned should aim not only to report on what is being done in various parts of the country, but should formulate standards and methods on which all could agree in order to give advice and help to persons engaged in social investigations. In this way the coördination of the agencies already existing could be obtained in the great work of making the social survey of the greatest possible usefulness in ascertaining the facts touching our social life, in working together on a constructive program for community betterment, and in preventing the abuses which sometimes have grown out of ill-advised efforts at social investigation and community betterment. What good reason is there why such organizations as the great philanthropic and scientific foundations, the universities and colleges, important national bodies like the Statistical Association, the Economic Association, the Sociological Society, and perhaps representatives from such national bodies as the Federal Industrial Relations Commission, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, etc., could not coöperate in giving the social survey movement direction as well as impetus?